

# Obituary

*British Heart Journal*, 1970, 32, 122.

## Hugh Barber

Hugh Barber, who died recently at the age of 92, had been a distinguished physician at Derby for sixty years. He was a student at Guy's in the last years of the nineteenth century when Henry Howse, who had journeyed to Edinburgh in 1870 to study Lister's anti-septic methods and introduced them to Guy's, was a senior surgeon.

Barber was born at Sheffield in 1877, the son of Christopher Barber, a stockbroker, and came of a Quaker family with long medical traditions. After schooling at York, and Owens College, Manchester, he came to Guy's and, like many others, loved it all his life.

Here he did well and after the usual house appointments was chosen as Medical Registrar for 1903-06, days when there were only two of them. Then, as he wanted to get married, he decided to join Dr. George Price in family practice at Derby. Probably he felt sure that Arthur Hurst would be the next physician on the staff, and he was appointed the next year. Hurst had been his pupil and often emphasized what a fine teacher Barber had been as registrar.

Barber played cricket and football for Guy's and the United Hospitals. He had already captained Yorkshire's second eleven and twice played for their first eleven.

Two years after going to Derby, he became physician to the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary. In 1914-18 he served as pathologist to the 39th General Hospital, B.E.F. in France. After the war his consulting work increased considerably and he took the membership of the Royal College of Physicians in 1926 and was made a Fellow in 1933, only the second to practise in Derby. He became a member of the Association of Physicians in 1929, then an unusual distinction for a physician of a non-teaching hospital. He founded the East Midlands Society of Physicians in 1943, the first of many similar regional societies. Having won the Derbyshire golf championship in 1913, he still played for the county when he was 60.

His wife died thirty years before him and one daughter, a distinguished bacteriologist at Hammersmith, was killed in a motor accident. But two daughters survive him and



nothing gave him greater happiness than taking his grandchildren up Scafell Pikes and Great Gable.

Barber's most important work was as a physician because, in addition to his extensive knowledge of medicine and commonsense, he had wide understanding of and deep sympathy with most men and women. His work on renal rickets or renal osteodystrophy and on traumatic injury to the heart, especially 'A fatal case of myocardial contusion' and 'Electrocardiographic changes due to trauma' (*British Heart Journal*, 1941, 3, 127; 1942, 4, 83), were additional distinctions. It was partly for this paper that he was elected to the British Cardiac Society.

M.C. writes 'Here I grew to like him and admire him and we had many talks at their meetings during the next fifteen years. He gave me his 1959 book *The Rewards of Medicine and Other Essays*, many of which had appeared in the Guy's Hospital Gazette. It is an excellent bedside book for any doctor. There are interesting chapters on Erasmus Darwin, who had practised at Derby more than a century before him and suggested a theory of evolution long before his grandson

Charles Darwin persuaded the world with *The Origin of Species*; and on the sort of medical history he would like to have been taught as a student. Others were on the medical wisdom of Jane Austen, on Smollett, and why every doctor should read *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, and on the act of dying, a subject not discussed as often as it should be. In *The Value of Fiction in Medical Education* he suggests there should be an examination for doctors or perhaps debates on several questions including: Have the young ladies described by Jane Austen and the modern girl much in common? Would the maiden lady in Cranford who rolled a ball under the bed to exclude a hidden burglar have been less courageous than ourselves in air raids? His earlier book *The Occasion Fleeting* shows how a physician trained in observational medicine felt, thought, and spoke in the first half of the twentieth century.'

M.L. writes: 'Medical Derby was shaped by Hugh Barber, and there was never one so warmly regarded and deeply respected as he.

'Physicians of my vintage came to know him when he was already in his eighties, but, because of his lively kindness and interest, the years fell away from the legend, and he became our good friend and wise contemporary. He illuminated our meetings, refreshed us with his clinical sense, and enthralled us with his personal memories of William Osler and W. G. Grace.

'The summer meeting of the Cardiac Society, with the sight of his old friends, was his particular pleasure. When tragedy bereaved him, we held our breath and feared the outcome, until we saw the quality that was courage holding him together.

'A little longer, and on his ninetieth birthday, we all sat around him in friendship, with Charles Baker to make the link with Guy's and complete his happiness. Hugh Barber was not a sentimental man, and would not have us be so, but his was a special simple greatness that we shall remember.'

MAURICE CAMPBELL

MICHAEL LEVEAUX